

Thomas E. Nisonger

Professor of Library and Information Science; Director of MLS Program

In the spring of 1988 Dr. Thomas E. Nisonger came from Texas to interview for a position as assistant professor in the School of Library and Information Science (SLIS). A television reporter outside the Union saw Nisonger as an expert and solicited his comments on the basketball coach because he was wearing “a Bobby Knight jacket.” The story has become legend for generations of SLIS students, who have come to respect Tom Nisonger’s expertise in collection development and library evaluation (if not basketball).

Tom Nisonger was born in Ohio and attended the College of Wooster, where he earned a B.A. in political science and history. He completed his Master of Library Science degree at the University of Pittsburgh and continued heading east, to graduate from Columbia University with a Ph.D. in comparative politics. He worked as a librarian at the University of Manitoba and the University of Texas at Dallas before joining the IU faculty.

Tom Nisonger’s three books connect his research with the practice of librarianship: *Collection Evaluation in Academic Libraries* (1992), *Management of Serials in Libraries* (1998), and *Evaluation of Library Collections, Access, and Electronic Resources* (2003) have been favorably reviewed and well received. He is the author of scores of articles, book chapters, conference papers, reviews, and bibliographies. In 2001 he received the K. G. Saur Award for the most outstanding article in *College & Research Libraries*. The arc of his publications traces developments in the field, beginning with the challenges of evaluating library collections, dealing with vendors and approval plans, observing the impact of electronic journals in the early 1990s, and outsourcing in the late ’90s. Tom’s longstanding interest in the use of bibliometric data for evaluation is a continuing theme; his careful analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of citation data was displayed in his 2004 “citation autobiography,” which demonstrated the increasing importance of the World Wide Web in assessing a publication’s impact by identifying citations of it.

From his earliest days at SLIS, his colleagues have relied on Tom Nisonger to make things work. He has readily and repeatedly taught foundational courses and both served on and chaired committees that have shaped the school’s programs and faculty. He has been director of the Master of Library Science program, faculty advisor of the award-winning Student Chapter of the American Library Association (ALA), and liaison to the Beta Phi Mu honorary society.

At the national level, Tom has served on several committees within the ALA, including the Library Research Round Table (which he chaired in 2001–2002), the Research and Statistics Assembly, the Association of College and Research Libraries Publications Committee, and the Education for Collection Development Committee of the Association for Library Collections and Technical Services. He has served on the editorial boards of *Library Acquisitions: Practice & Theory* (where he was also the book review section editor);

Library Collections, Acquisitions, & Technical Services; Collection Building; and Behavioral & Social Sciences Librarian.

Professor Emerita Judy Serebnick describes Tom as:

“the perfect faculty colleague. Whether we were planning for courses, discussing research, or serving on committees, or speaking with students, or sharing good or bad news, he was always fully engaged, discerning, and supportive. Tom’s warmth, optimism, compassion, and humor are what I remember.”

One of Tom’s doctoral students, Jennifer Paustenbaugh, recalled:

“I will always feel eternal gratitude to Tom for his enormous personal generosity. His quiet encouragement, his ability to balance strong personalities, and his always helpful feedback really humanized the process of my completing my dissertation by long distance. When I finally participated in commencement exercises in 1999 and was privileged to be hooded by him, I could not think of anyone that I more wanted to receive that honor from than Tom.”

Students and alumni often mention Professor Nisonger as one of the best at SLIS; their accolades earned him the school’s 2000 Teaching Excellence Recognition Award and 2004 Trustees Teaching Award. Typical student comments include:

- *“Professor Nisonger knows the topic inside and out and expresses it wonderfully.”*
- *“It was one of the least painful lecture classes I’ve ever had.”*
- *“Dr. Nisonger and his sense of humor are what made this class so enjoyable. I learned a lot about the subject and enjoyed the course.”*
- *“Professor Nisonger is amazing—very engaging, enthusiastic, knowledgeable, personable. . . . He packed every class full of information. . . . I appreciated all the jokes, even the bad ones!”*
- *“Wear the Bobby Knight jacket more often :)”*
- *“Dr. Nisonger is incredibly well organized. From the first day of class his students know exactly what will be covered and what is expected of them. The projects are practical and interesting—designed to help students (and future librarians) think analytically and critically.”*

Mary Popp, who has co-advised the ALA student chapter with Tom, commented on his dedication to the students:

“Every year, for the last several years, the ALA Student Chapter has had a fancy dress party. This has been held in the lovely University Club in the Indiana Memorial Union. It features nice wines, hors d’oeuvres, and music. We are able to use the room only because Tom is a member of the University Club. He reserves the room, signs all the paperwork, and takes full responsibility. That means he arrives at the first moment the room is reserved and stays until the last person leaves and all the cleanup is done, usually 4 to 5 hours later. In the interim, he

mingles with the students and their friends and makes everyone feel at home. No one is left out. It is no wonder that the students think he is wonderful!"

Tom and his wife, Claire, an instructor in the biology department, have put down roots in Bloomington. Not surprisingly, however, they intend to do some traveling so Tom can conduct research in libraries and archives after his retirement. Maybe the storied Bobby Knight jacket will provide a starting point for another quarter century of jokes and friendships.

Debora Shaw